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EDITORIAL

Principal Church of Cicero Township High School continues his revolutionary tactics. In the *School Review* for September appeared an article by him on "The Use of Scientific Material in the High-School Course in English," in which is described a plan of dividing the time between fiction and poetry on the one hand and science and history on the other. The writer declares that his pupils evince a lively interest in the writings of Burroughs, Parkman, Thoreau, Tyndall, Darwin, and Fiske, and that their greater freedom of expression is noticeable.

The account is suggestive, but not convincing. It is not true, as he states, that the general practice is to read only one book a semester in high-school classes. There are on record, moreover, several studies of children's tastes in reading, all of which tend to show that the books which appeal to youth are those which are deeply human. Careful observation of nature is the exception and not the rule among boys and girls in their teens. The enthusiasm of a man, himself imbued with the scientific spirit, has apparently led the writer to attribute to the books an effect due to the contagion of his own example.

The plan proposed is, nevertheless, worthy of consideration. That the English teacher should train his pupils in the reading of all kinds of valuable books appears reasonable. Distinction should be made, however, between English and literature. The teacher of history may very well assume responsibility for Fiske's *Critical Period*, though not for Homer's *Odyssey*. And it should be remembered that the works of the poets have unique and enduring value, even in a fact-ridden age.

The Teachers of English in New York City have done well to call attention once more to the deplorable situation in which they, in company with their colleagues in Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, are placed. When one reads that the English teachers of these cities are, on the average, required to instruct from 158 to 181 pupils, reciting twenty or more periods each week, he can but reflect that there are munici-

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pal problems other than those of preventing graft or disposing of garbage. For instruction in English, as everybody knows—or ought to know—is largely an individual matter. Yet such conditions as those revealed in the New York report are all but prohibitive of individual instruction. They impose a burden of work which must, in many cases, unfit teachers for any service at all. How long, O Lord, how long!

Because it is so familiar, though we know it to be fundamental, we do not always realize perhaps how vitally important in our educational system is the work of the elementary school. If for no other reason than that it is the only school attended by most children, it should have the best teachers, the best salaries, the best general equipment and conditions, and the best results. Especially should the results of its training in English be above reproach—such as to leave later schools free from the necessity of attempting, more or less unsuccessfully, to remedy defects of earlier training, and free to proceed with their own special business.

The investigation, carried on for the last three years, of high-school and college English teaching and particularly of the teaching of English composition, has shown conclusively what in those schools are the essential conditions of efficiency measured in terms of time and labor, and approximately what is the necessary cost. The results of this study have had such weight and influence that the committee having the matter in charge has been asked to make a similar study of elementary-school English, has been enlarged for the purpose, and has, to this end, received the official recognition and support of the United States Bureau of Education. But the investigation of elementary-school conditions is a very much more complicated and difficult problem than was that of secondary schools, and to be successful in handling it the committee needs the assistance of a large number of special co-workers among elementary teachers and others intimately concerned.

In a letter from the chairman, hereinafter printed, all English teachers' organizations affiliated with the National Council are called upon for assistance, and a plan is indicated for organizing under

their direction committees representing the elementary teachers of as many localities as possible. The *Journal* commends the matter to the special attention of those addressed, requests for the committee their most complete co-operation, and intends to give all possible space to the progress and results of the inquiry and to all related matters—because these are of interest and importance not to elementary teachers alone but to all teachers in all schools.

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN

In the *Outlook* for August 16, Mr. Edward W. Bok, the editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, raises the momentous question, "Is the College Making Good?" His method of arriving at the answer should have especial interest for the readers of the *English Journal*, for he bases his conclusions solely upon specimens of English composition. A year ago he caused a letter to be sent to the Seniors of six of the leading women's colleges asking each Senior to say what the college had done for her. This year he made the same experiment with five of the universities. Replies to these letters were graded and marked by an experienced high-school teacher. Selections from the women's letters were printed with facsimiles in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and some of these are reprinted in the article in the *Outlook*. Casting his eye over the net results, Mr. Bok is disheartened. The young women cannot write legibly or spell correctly or say what they mean. The young men, if a trifle better in these regards, are still not quite literate, and, worse, they are discourteous. Hence the conclusion that the college is incompetent or, to employ Mr. Bok's chaste expression, is not making good.

Fortunately, one may approve of Mr. Bok's choice of method without approving either of Mr. Bok (in this connection) or of his inferences. To speak frankly, the editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal* is not precisely the person one would select to conduct an investigation of this kind. It is in the editorial columns of that worthy magazine that the curious reader may find the choicest illustrations of the deadliest of all deadly sins in English composition—banality. We mean a compliment to Mr. Bok when we say that his literary art is the quintessence of the banal. In this regard he

is unapproachable. Like the poet Gower, he has elevated tediousness to the precision of a science. He can not only discover for his editorial articles the most jejune and futile of possible themes, but he can take themes that are brimming with suggestion and the joy of life and with his leaden stylus draw them out into marvels of laborious inanity. For the exercise of this unique and splendid gift, Mr. Bok is reputed to receive a salary of \$50,000 a year, and he earns every cent of it. But for this very reason one might excusably hesitate to accept his judgment of the naïve confessions of young men and women who, in the words of the commencement orator, are about to plunge into the vortex of modern life. It is difficult to imagine a man of his peculiar qualities as heartily in sympathy with their fluttering hopes and fears, their as yet unassimilated ideas and ideals, their raw ambitions. To infer from a single letter whether these young souls will in the course of time themselves make good—which is after all the real question at issue—requires, we are confident, a type of mind which Mr. Bok has as yet shown no evidence of possessing.

Mr. Bok's main charge, however, at least against the men students, is not that they are illiterate but that they are discourteous, and on this point he is entitled to a hearing. The male students' discourtesy is proved by the fact that out of 1,875 to whom letters were sent, only 449 replied. Says Mr. Bok: "In other words, 1,426 students did not see fit to answer, in any way, a simple, courteous business letter, although a stamped, addressed envelope was inclosed. Here, then, were 1,426 young men about to go out into the business and professional world within six months, who had no conception of the fundamental business rule that a business letter calls for an answer, and that a stamped, addressed envelope entails, in a sense, a moral obligation upon the receiver." If this is business etiquette, the present writer must himself confess to many breaches of courtesy. Hardly a week passes that he does not receive a "simple, courteous business letter" from some promoter of oil wells or gold mines or Florida orange ranches. In every case the writer of the letter makes an urgent plea for an immediate response, and usually he is so thoughtful as to inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. But does the editor promptly and courteously

reply to these letters? He does not. Carefully peeling off the stamp from the addressed envelope, he throws the letter and all of its contents callously into the wastebasket. That is no doubt just what each one of the 1,426 students did when Mr. Bok's inquiry came. And why should they not? Is a Senior's valuable time and attention at the mercy of anybody who can afford to send him a two-cent stamp? Absurd! And speaking of courtesy, what shall be said of the amenity of Mr. Bok in printing facsimiles of confidential correspondence and holding the courteous writers up to ridicule before the million-odd readers of the *Ladies' Home Journal*? "By the dog," as Socrates said to Gorgias on a memorable occasion, "there will be a great deal of discussion before we get at the truth of all this."

We would suggest to Mr. Bok that if he sincerely desires to investigate the teaching of English composition in our colleges he should first read carefully the files of the *English Journal*. There he will find portrayed as in a clear mirror the ambitions, the spirit, and the methods of modern teachers of English. An intimate knowledge of these things is, we submit, an indispensable preliminary to any collection of data and to any study of results.